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Inequalities for women in male-dominated workplace in Western countries

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1. Introduction

For the last hundred years an increasing number of women pushed into male dominated employment but today women still claim to face gender specific inequalities on many levels (Torre 2014). This shift to recruit more nontraditional work force once was generated by a mismatch of labor market demand and labor market supply as well as the economic pressure to be cost efficient. Nowadays it can be observed that employers are more sensitive to society valuation but still they are not able to prevent inequalities caused by sex distinction (Reskin 1993).

As the Western countries consider themselves as countries of equality and freedom, they are often seen as emancipated but in the business environment there is several contradictory evidence for this statement considering diverse degrees of emancipation in different countries. Although the American civil rights and other institutions preclude sex discrimination by law, the gender gap is widening (Barton et al 2014; Reskin 1993). Comparable to this law, other North American and European countries have similar regulation in their dispensation of law.

As the sex is a hardly influenceable identity characteristic and no valid indicator for a person's qualification, it is still one of the main selection criteria in the employment process in Western society. So to which extent are especially women who work in male domains restricted in their career progress?

2. Male- dominated workplace

While female-dominated occupation is traditionally perceived as highly social with a great degree of emotional involvement, male-dominated employment is regarded as individualistic, asocial, and extremely assertive plus competitive (Wentling & Thomas). Additionally the hierarchical dominance is much more distinctive in male-dominated sectors where men also tend to use a wider range of fierce behavior, in direct ways as well as in indirect ways, than women (Lee & Botheridge in Gilbert, Raffo & Sutarso 2013). Therefore the recruitment of women in a male-dominated environment seems to be contrary to the typical female attributes Western societies emphasize by also treating women differently in education paths despite of the claim of being emancipated and equal (Barton et al 2015).

3. Complications

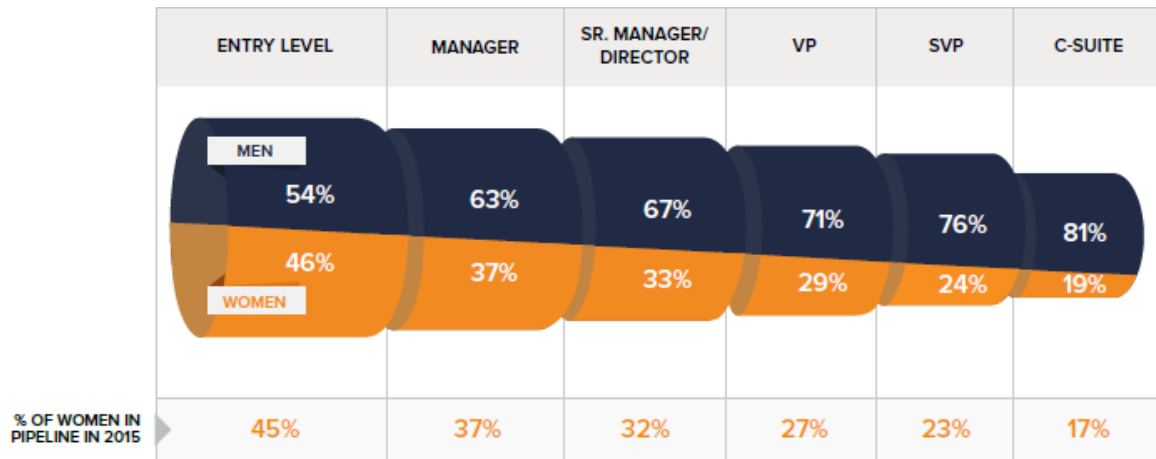
3.1 Sex specific inequalities

Several studies (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009; McKinsey & Company 2015; Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011) put a lot of effort in the task to identify the key differences in gender treatment.

Some of the results are that on the one hand men are chosen over women in a promotion situation on the base of their potential while women tend to have to demonstrate performance before promotion. This "performance evaluation bias" (McKinsey & Company 2015) displays the inequality in business opportunity of employees who hold similar qualification but differ in their gender. In some cases even less qualified men are favored over their highly skilled female coworker because of potential (Roth 2007). As a consequence of the reduced hope to promote many women are stuck in jobs with lack of opportunity for advancement and consequently lower their work commitment (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009).

On the other hand women are rewarded differently for successful results than men by superiors and themselves. Female worker tend to weaken their influence on the result and attribute it to external factors like endurance rather than skills and know-how. This mindset is called "performance attribution bias" (McKinsey & Company 2015) and is usually caused by a different treatment of boys and girls in the childhood and during the stages of education. Along with the performance evaluation bias, the performance attribution bias has a significant effect on the promotion probability of female employees.

This leads to the "glass ceiling effect"(Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011; Michailidis, Morphitou & Theophylatou 2012) which describes the incidence that high qualified members of minorities do not reach an advancement to executive positions due to invisible mental barriers created by prejudice among others. This may also result in pressing female employees in a small range of activities in less advantageous departments with little responsibility, a lot of conventional tasks and few opportunities in career progression. Hence with regard to the term of reference female employees have less beneficial working conditions than men and are less likely to exercise power (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009).



(McKinsey & Company 2015, p.5)

This chart is called "gender representation in the corporate pipeline in 2015" and outlines the different opportunities of men and women to get promoted and/or recruited to a higher position. It is clearly to see that the higher the position, the fewer women are appointed (McKinsey & Company 2015). This might not only be caused by the glass ceiling effect but by a various number of other factors which can be either private or professional.

3.2 Stereotyping

According to Gilbert, Raffo and Sutarso (2013) "more than half of targets in workplace bullying cases are women". Considering that there is always the opportunity that the feeling of discrimination can be caused by a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the word choice in communication (Eisenstadt) because of the different communication styles men and women use, there is a tendency for punishment if a man or a woman acts contrary to the expected role behavior (Gilbert, Raffo & Sutarso 2013). However in business life this kind of castigation is more often found towards women than towards men.

Additional to the punishment as a consequence of incongruent behavior, female employees experience conflicting drift when trying to fulfill the expected role manners and the formal requirements of the occupation due to a negative correlation of the "likeability bias" (McKinsey & Company 2015). While the correlation of being liked and being competent has a negative correlation for women, the same correlation for

male employees is positive. So female workforce has to decide to a certain extent whether they want to make it to the top by being competent or being admired and liked by their coworker.

In male-dominated jobs being competent is often more expedient than being nice although there are consequences for women not matter which decision they prefer.

The effect of the likeability bias could be mitigated through female executives who function as role model. Nevertheless the main barrier for women achieving this goal is stereotyping. As these days women still tend to be a minority in most male-dominated workplace and numerical minorities incline to be more visible, the chance for stereotyping these minorities is risen (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011).

After overcoming the hindrance of stereotyping on a corporate base, the company can avail itself of their female worker's indispensable contribution to innovation and ambition and therefore gain qualitatively (Whitney & Ames 2014). Otherwise stereotyping continues to exclude qualified labor and limits the pool of suitable applicants for a corporation.

3.3 Motherhood penalty

Furthermore many companies unconsciously advocate the traditional perception of women being housekeeper and only a temporary workforce until they set up their own family. This expectation of women getting children and then being their primary caregiver influences recruitment behavior as well as promotion frequency and disadvantages women who want to build their career (Baert 2014).

Indeed family issues are statistically one of the main factors that hinder female employees to develop their career (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009). Especially the perception that it is impossible for women to start a family and work in the same position is rooted in the mindset of both genders.

The major problem that comes along with pregnancy is not the work load but the discriminatory behavior of coworker and the maternal stereotyping which often is not seen as part of sex discrimination (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011). This means coworker see the pregnant women no longer as professionals because this state of pregnancy is associated with femininity which unconsciously equals incompetence and weakness in male-dominated business in most cases. By contrast if the pregnant women

stay committed to their jobs they are perceived as inadequate maternal (Williams 2004). As a consequence thereof many women fear that their parental leave equally to their stay will be punished by their colleagues (McKinsey & Company 2015) for either leaving the workplace to be a homemaker mother or for not fulfilling the stereotype of a caring, homemaker mother which is still fixed in most minds.

According to a study in Belgium there is business related discrimination when at least the opportunity exists to get pregnant in the future. The study observed that homosexual women in young fertile years are favored over heterosexual women with the same attributes in recruitment while there was no difference for more mature women with a lower risk for pregnancy in the near future no matter what sexual orientation (Baert 2014).

3.4 Sex based harassment

Sex based harassment as a form of gender discrimination is merely driven by sexist aggression to secure the own social status against a potential threat. Therefore sexual harassment is mainly used to hinder women to achieve higher position in their field of occupation which has also the effect that it is more likely to keep them economically dependent on men (Berdahl 2007).

Sex based harassment is equally used by men and women dealing with threat to maintain their status while they differ in the execution of the harassment.

Mainly high-skilled women or women with great authority might be perceived as imminence to their male and female coworker and therefore are more likely to experience sex based harassment during their career path (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011). Most of these actions include humiliation, demeanor and derogation which not only cause indisposition of the person concerned towards the work place but can also result in mental harm. Men tend to suffer from sex based harassment outside their professional team if they do not fit the gender perception of society (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011).

Moreover companies often increase the effect by promoting internal competition between colleagues which increases the competitive threat and therefore the tendency of sex based harassment (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011).

3.4.1 Feminine and masculine women

According to a study women are treated differently in men dominated workplace depending on whether they are seen as feminine or masculine.

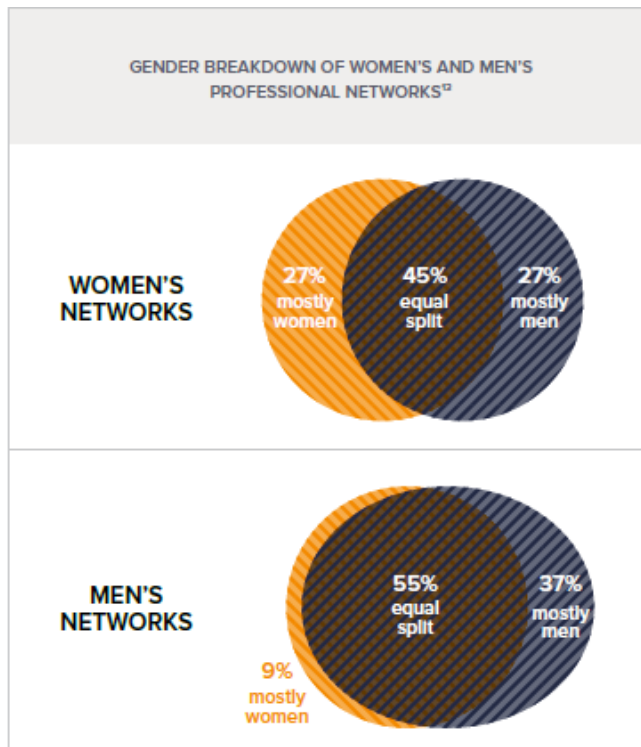
While women with more masculine attributes statistically have to cope with isolation because they rarely receive any support by male coworker who additionally tend to behave with antipathy, more feminine women tend to get in contact with condescendence and sex based harassment (Pedavis in Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011).

3.5 Mentoring and networks

As men statistically receive the opportunity to deal with challenging tasks more often and to broaden their minds, their female counterparts are more likely to be delegated to rather work on routine work than on challenges. This can be seen as one of the two main barriers to women to achieve a higher position (Michailidis, Morphitou & Theophylatou 2012).

The second barrier is that women are less likely to get aid in career progression from their mostly male superior. The recent distribution of male and female superior can also be an impediment due to this lack of female role models in management level (McKinsey & Company 2015).

Due to differences in communication the professional networks of men and women are unlike which gives them advantage or disadvantages in business life.



(McKinsey & Company 2015, p.13)

As the chart shows the professional networks of men statistically consists of a network where 37% mostly network with other men, only 9% of male workforce has a network of mainly female contacts. Female professionals on the contrary have a mainly female network (27%) or a mainly male network (27%) both at the same percentage. But in comparison to their male colleagues, women have a smaller frequency of gender equal networks (45%) than men (55%).

Consequently to the networking issue there are little mentoring programs tailored for women which make it difficult for women to climb the social ladder the same way men make their careers (Michailidis, Morphitou & Theophylatou 2012).

3.6 Wage gap

Although there is an increasing number of women working in male-dominated jobs, female employees are still confronted with a wage level below the salary level of their equivalently qualified male counterpart. Therefore women are economically harmed in comparison to their male colleagues (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009). This might be the reason that the pay difference between men and women for holding the same position and related workforce regularly arises in the media and has a special meaning for politicians before election. Nevertheless it can't be mitigated that the most calculation of

pay differences exclude a possible parental leave or an agreement on different, favorable job conditions like a lower salary but more flexible working time compared to their male counterpart.

4. Workplace culture

The workplace culture is essential for a huge amount of outcomes in a company. Therefore it is not surprising that the workplace culture has an influence on the way male employees behave towards their female coworker in male-dominated occupation as well as the behavior of women towards their male colleagues. A workplace culture, from which all involved people have the opportunity to profit, has to reflect a supportive mindset which comes along with respect and acceptance for all coworker no matter of which gender, race, country or background they are.

Working in such a commendable, supportive environment not only has a positive impact on mental condition of all employees and the solidarity in the company, it also reduces the endangerment through sex based discrimination and bullying at work (Stainback, Ratliff & Roscigno 2011).

For a toxic workplace culture which includes bullying, sexual harassment and hostility can negatively affect creativity and productivity and increases the emotional and mental pressure on employees which is destructive for a company in the long term, the culture can be changed to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect, support and sensitivity (Douglas 2015). This can be achieved for example by creating awareness, team building measures and positive corporate code which describe and examine the desired contact.

By fostering a supportive surrounding the tendency of women to believe that they are the sole exception of the rule of general sex bias (Sipe, Fisher & Johnson 2009) can be reduced by recognizing the sex inequalities with the beneficial result that possible gender discrimination they might face are not seen as personal offense but prejudices.

Therefore the workplace culture is one of the most important instruments to prevent and avoid workplace discrimination.

5. Conclusion

The dimension of inequalities for women in male-dominated work sectors goes beyond the pure wage inequality the media focuses on in a biased way as the media denies the complexity of this topic in the most cases. But in addition these wage inequalities do not detain women from their career progress.

The bigger challenge is the hostile behavior female employees often have to face in everyday business and in cooperation with their male coworker but also with their female colleagues. Therefore the simplification that there is no intra-competitive attitude between women in ordinary workplace environment is not appropriate and the intra-competitive pressure joins the inter-competition with men as part of rivalry for promotion, recognition and maintaining the social status.

Facing these tools of hostile treatment especially the mental issues, that can occur because of gender focused bullying, can generate a serious danger for the mental and physical health and therefore gender discrimination and bullying should be taken special care of in a corporate environment.

Thereby the main factor that restricts the professional development of female employees in male-dominated occupation is a mental factor of these women themselves but also of their business environment.

Especially the fear of not fulfilling the assumed expectations of coworker regarding their anticipated role behavior patterns and the accompanied worry to be punished is a factor with which female professionals block themselves to climb the social ladder. Thus they become their own nemesis.

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